

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 1312

By Marrero B

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Harold E. Buehler of Memphis.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pause to recognize those whose life and works have made a remarkable impact upon the people and landscape of Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, one such special person whose works and deeds will live on after his passing was Harold E. Buehler of Memphis, a teacher, coach, and prolific developer of over 2,000 units of affordable housing in the blighted, inner city areas of Memphis, West Memphis, Arkansas, and Ripley, Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, his parents, civil rights activists The Reverend Dr. John A. Buehler and Josie Buehler, decided to dedicate their lives to improving human relations and moved from Indiana to Memphis in the early 1960s to pastor an African-American church, the Chelsea Avenue Church of God, in the Douglas community; and

WHEREAS, moving their family to the neighboring Hyde Park community, Dr. Buehler taught at Lemoyne-Owen College and Mrs. Buehler taught in the Memphis City School System; in the still-segregated schools, Harold and his siblings were bussed to the all-white Humes High School miles away instead of walking to their neighborhood African American school; and

WHEREAS, initially, Harold Buehler followed his parents' career path, becoming a math and chemistry teacher and coach at public schools, including Cypress Junior High School and Northside, Frayser, and Central High Schools; and

WHEREAS, as a track coach, Mr. Buehler founded a North Memphis track club summer program that drew hundreds of youths at a time, growing to host a summer camp serving over 1,000 inner city youths; offering jobs and training, the track club helped boost many athletes, including Memphian Rochelle Stevens, who won a gold medal at the 1996 Olympics; and

WHEREAS, legions of Coach Buehler's former track club members across Memphis can provide stories of him taking them on their first trip to a track meet in Florida or St. Louis and many of his former chemistry students went on to college and careers as doctors and healthcare professionals; and

WHEREAS, in the 1980s, Mr. Buehler embarked upon a career in real estate, quickly abandoning commercial sales to focus on creating affordable housing and increasing homeownership among his former students; and

WHEREAS, encouraged by the demand he saw from his former students and others for new housing in the inner city, Harold Buehler and his wife, Jo Ellen, built thousands of new homes on vacant tax sale lots in decaying neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, partnering with Shelby County government and the Feed the Children program to build Northside Terrace and create and utilize a down payment grant program, Mr. Buehler ensured that his buyers received FHA loans, never predatory or nonconforming mortgages; and

WHEREAS, Harold Buehler could be seen every Sunday morning as host of the Buehler Affordable Home Show, featuring testimonials from dozens of low income homebuyers telling how they bought their first home and Mr. Buehler performing a zany skit at the end of the show; and

WHEREAS, in the 1990s, Mr. Buehler recognized that the thousands who could not buy homes would move back to the inner city if they could rent a new home and thus developed a plan that used apartment financing and THDA low-income housing tax credits to help finance the building of single-family rental homes; and

WHEREAS, Harold Buehler's pioneering plan caught on all over the country and resulted in the building of rental houses that tenants could eventually own; the U.S. Congress provided federal incentives for state and local government housing agencies to promote this innovative program; and

WHEREAS, the effect of the Buehler program saw Memphis tear down their public housing and move hundreds of families into new Buehler homes, revitalizing older neighborhoods and benefitting the lives of citizens who never dreamed of living in a new home;

Harold Buehler brought over \$150 million dollars in new investment and new or renovated homes to the inner city over the last three decades; and

WHEREAS, Harold Buehler leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional public servant and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Harold Buehler, reflecting fondly upon his lifetime of building scholars, athletes, homes and communities and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Mr. Buehler, extending our best wishes to his wife and children in their efforts to continue his work and life's mission.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.